

The University of Chicago

MARTIN VAN BUREN AND THE
FREE SOIL MOVEMENT

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1932

By

ALTO LEE WHITEHURST

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CHAPTER IV

BEARER OF A NEW STANDARD

As the date of the National Democratic Convention approached, it became certain that New York would send two delegations. If there had ever existed a possibility of the reconciliation of Barnburners and Hunkers that possibility had passed when the Hunkers held the Albany Convention late in January, 1848. Circumstances prevented the Barnburners from participating at Albany. The Albany meeting prevented the Hunkers from attending the Utica Convention on February 16. At the date of the Utica Convention the Hunkers were holding Congressional district conventions in which they were selecting delegates to the national party convention. The supporters of the Utica State Convention were equally determined to send a delegation.

After electing their delegations the two factions began to prepare their claims to admission to the convention.¹ In the preparation of their claims the Hunkers had distinct advantages. Not only had they pledged themselves to support the candidates of the Baltimore Convention but they desired to become a portion of the convention.² Upon this point the Barnburners lacked solidarity. The New York Evening Post insisted that the Utica delegates alone should be accepted by the Baltimore Convention.³ Others contended that the Barnburners would have greater influence

¹Albany Argus, Feb. 5, March 8, 1848; N.Y. Evening Post, Feb. 25, 1848.

²Albany Argus, Feb. 5, 1848.

³N. Y. Evening Post, Feb. 25, 1848.

outside the convention than in it.¹ By securing seats at Baltimore, they would pledge themselves to support any ticket which might be nominated.² It appeared certain that the influence of the Polk administration would predominate at Baltimore.³ If it did predominate, the choice of a candidate satisfactory to the Barnburners could hardly be expected.⁴

Also the Barnburners had difficulty in determining whether or not they would present a candidate to the convention.⁵ Not to do so appeared to indicate a lack of purpose. The tendency, however, had been toward declining to offer one.⁶ Really they had only one potential candidate. That was Ex-President Van Buren.⁷ But Senator Allen of Ohio, Governor Shunk of Pennsylvania, Senator Benton of Missouri, or Senator Dix of New York, would satisfy them.⁸ Neither of these leaders really had a strong claim to the nomination. In order to determine upon some line of policy concerning a candidate and other matters, the Barnburner delegation of New York decided to hold a caucus in New York City prior to going to Baltimore.⁹ In the meantime John Van Buren developed a plan. He proposed to have Preston King, James Wadsworth, and Dr. John Beekman ask the New York delegates to present the name of his father as their candidate and carry into the convention the

¹Van Buren Papers (Library of Congress), Niles to Van Buren, April 18, 1848; National Era, April 20, 1848.

²Ibid.; Van Buren Papers, Niles to Van Buren, April 18, 1848.

³Ibid., Taylor to J. Van Buren, April 18, 1848; Butler to Van Buren, May 9, 1846; Boston Atlas, May 20, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Van Buren Papers, Niles to Van Buren, April 18, 1848.

⁵Ibid., Taylor to J. Van Buren, April 18, 1848; Van Buren to J. Van Buren, May 3, 1848.

⁶Proceedings of the Utica Convention; Van Buren Papers, J. Van Buren to Van Buren, April 30, 1848; Taylor to J. Van Buren, April 18, 1848.

⁷Ibid., J. Van Buren to Van Buren, April 30, 1848; Wilson to Van Buren, May 9, 1848; Medary to Van Buren, May 5, 1848.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Albany Evening Atlas, May 6, 1848; Van Buren Papers, Hunt to J. Van Buren, April 26, 1848; Butler to Gillet, May 8, 1848.

Ordinance of 1787 as the basis for the platform.¹ If the convention rejected both the candidate and the Ordinance of 1787, it had no intention of seeking to please the Barnburners.² In that case they could bolt the convention and nominate General Taylor or some other man.³ John Van Buren believed that, if his father could secure the nomination, he would certainly be elected.⁴

The boldness of this plan irritated the Ex-President.⁵ The conservatives, he knew, would immediately understand it and would discredit the progressive movement.⁶ Moreover, Van Buren insisted in a letter to his son that the political agitation which had occurred in the preceding five years had rendered his reelection impossible.⁷ Under only one condition could any hope of success be entertained. If he could secure the support of the South, he might obtain the election.⁸ But every assurance needed had been given, he thought, that this would never be obtained.⁹

The last portion of Van Buren's letter to his zealous son contained suggestions which would serve as guides for the Utica delegates at Baltimore.¹⁰ Before the date of the convention he had enlarged these directions into a detailed list of instructions to be observed by them in the convention.¹¹ To him the Utica delegation appeared to have two general objectives to achieve. First, its members should represent the Democracy of the state, "before their political brethren of the Union, in the form best calculated to command their present respect & win their future

¹Ibid., J. Van Buren to Van Buren, April 30, 1848.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., Van Buren to J. Van Buren, May 3, 1848.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., "Suggestions for the conduct of the Utica delegation at the Baltimore Convention."

regard" and, second, "to discharge their delicate duty in a manner which will secure their own self-respect & command that of others."¹

To assist in accomplishing these most difficult aims the Ex-President furnished a formidable list of instructions. These contained many suggestions. The state had no candidate for the nomination. Therefore, the disinterested policy adopted by the Utica Convention must be continued. To act otherwise would

impair the usefulness of the delegation, & bring suspicion & discredit upon our whole course in regard to the great question which distinguishes our condition from ²from [sic] that of our political brethren in other states.

Every position taken must be of such nature as to give assurance of justice and fairness.³ Each position must be defined without reserve when necessity dictated explanations but never before.⁴ The intrigues prepared by sinister influences and submitted to the convention by designing delegates had to be uniformly refuted by "mildness, directness, and firmness."⁵

It occurred to Van Buren that the delegation must decide in advance the course to be adopted in case certain points of controversy arose. Concerning admission he believed that the delegates should exhibit neither too great desire nor sufficient indifference to foster "the suspicion of preferring to create distraction."⁶ No claim beyond that founded upon the validity of the two state organizations could in prudence be made.⁷ All attempts by the convention to extract a pledge from the delegation to support the nomination as an inducement for admission "should be repelled as insulting";⁸ and any effort to diminish the strength of

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

the delegation in the convention should be met by withdrawal of the claim to admission.¹ The delegation must stand against the imposition of any test upon the question of slavery in the territories and offer a resolution opposing the introduction of this troublesome issue into the convention. If the southern delegates refused to vote for this resolution, they should not be allowed to secure the adoption of their pro-slavery one. But the Barnburners should acquiesce in any effort to table the whole slavery issue.²

Cass and Dallas, he stated, had accepted upon constitutional ground and Buchanan upon that of expediency the southern position in regard to the extension of slavery into the territories. Although Woodbury had made no public statement of his position, he doubtless had given an indication of his sentiments to South Carolina and Florida. The actions of the Democrats in these states appeared to be based upon assurances from Woodbury. Also the fact that he held a position upon the Supreme Court bench militated against his choice as party nominee. Van Buren believed that not one of these men could secure the support of the Democracy of New York. An explanation of this attitude must be furnished to the convention. If the Barnburners gave this information prior to the preparation of a ticket, they would secure release from all obligations to support it. They could follow the precedent set by the Democrats of Virginia in their refusal to vote for R.M. Johnson, the party's Vice-Presidential Candidate, in 1836. Whether the delegation should designate a preference for a candidate depended upon the circumstances. If the Barnburners saw a good opportunity, they might promise cheerful support for either Shunk of Pennsyl-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

vania, Senator Dodge of Wisconsin, Allen of Ohio, or Governor Anderson of Maine.¹

The bad faith involved in a re-nomination of President Polk, Van Buren considered, relieved the Utica delegation of any duty of giving an advance statement concerning this proposal. The official announcement of such a purpose, however, would require a declaration of the intention by the Barnburners to dissolve connections with the convention. Barnburners could in that case make a separate appeal to the Democracy of the Union. In explanation of this determination the causes for the decision must be stated. The circumstances under which Polk had secured the nomination in 1844, his promise not to be a candidate for re-election, and his betrayal of Wright precluded the possibility of his obtaining the approval of the radical Democracy of New York. Regard for the National Administration, involved as it had been in a foreign war, had sealed the lips and stilled the pens of the radicals of the state; but persistence in the re-nomination of the President would raise the flood gates against the "assasin" of Silas Wright.²

Arming themselves with these instructions the Barnburners repaired to Baltimore after holding their meeting in New York City.³ Here the national party convention assembled May 22, 1848, and held its meetings in the Universalist church.⁴ Judge Bryce of Louisiana received the election as temporary chairman.⁵ Reverend Fisk offered an appropriate prayer.⁶

Delegate Cone of Georgia presented resolutions which re-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Albany Evening Atlas, May 20, 1848.

⁴Niles' Register, 74: 71.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention held at Baltimore, May 22, 1848; The Daily Union, May 23, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

⁶Niles' Register, 74: 71.

requested the selection of one member by each state delegation, except in the case of New York which should choose two, for the purpose of forming a credentials committee.¹ Cambreleng, a Barnburner of New York, suggested that the resolutions be so changed as to provide for the organization of a special committee to consider the New York controversy.² To this suggestion Dickinson, the Hunker leader, objected, stating that the regular committee appeared adequate.³ Hannegan of Indiana sought first to place these resolutions on the table; but failing in this effort he offered another which stated,

That each delegate present, and every person claiming to be a delegate, shall pledge himself to support the nominees of this convention, and to use all honorable and just means to secure their election.⁴

William L. Yancey of Alabama and Cone made short speeches opposing the pledge.⁵ The convention tabled Hannegan's resolution and turned to that of Cone.⁶ The debate on the Cone resolutions hinged upon the question of so amending the original ones as to exclude the two members of New York from the credentials committee.⁷ Tilden of New York attempted to make certain the full investigation of the Utica claims to admission by presenting an amendment to this effect. But the convention tabled it.⁸ Preston King began to address the chair upon the matter of the New York delegations.

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; The Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

³Ibid.; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Proceedings.

⁴Ibid.; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

⁶Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

⁷Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

⁸Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

Bright of Indiana tried to stop him by raising a point of order and calling for the previous question.¹ To this procedure King objected so strenuously that Bright withdrew his call for the question. King continued to explain to the convention that the Utica delegation would never consent to allow the examination of their claim by a secret committee which had been instructed only to examine the credentials and report the names of the delegates.² Dickinson responded to these statements saying that the Hunker delegation had complete confidence in the wisdom and justice of the credentials committee.³ The convention then adopted a modified substitute for the Cone resolutions⁴ which formed a committee without a member of either group from New York.

At the evening session the credentials committee made a partial report naming the delegates from all the states except New York.⁵ The convention accepted the committee's incomplete report.⁶ Next the question of the number of votes to be cast by the one delegate from South Carolina arose. To it the delegates gave considerable attention. The convention continued discussion of this matter until it received the report of the committee on organization.⁷

The second day of the convention was begun by the installation of permanent officers. Andrew Stevenson of Virginia was

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

³Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 25, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

⁶Ibid.; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

⁷Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

made permanent chairman.¹ After the completion of the organization Cone explained that he had opposed the Hannegan resolution on the preceding day because the convention had not then been organized. He sent the resolution to the chair to be read and moved that it be adopted.² Yancey protested that the body had not yet completed its organization.³ Cone presented another resolution which stated that votes should be made by states when so requested by one state and that each state should have as many votes as members in the electoral college.⁴ The rules of the House of Representatives were adopted without debate. But considerable controversy developed before the adoption of the Two-Thirds Rule.⁵

During the day and evening of the first day and the morning of the second of the convention the credentials committee sought to determine the membership of the state delegations. No real difficulty was encountered except in the case of New York. Having disposed of all other matters the committee designated 8:00 P.M. of the first day as the time for considering that case.⁶ Both delegations attended the committee meeting. Rodgers of Pennsylvania presented two resolutions to the committee. The first of these provided that the contesting delegations from New York be allowed three hours in which to present their respective claims to seats. This resolution readily received the support of the committee.⁷ The second resolution required that both groups pledge

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 23, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Daily Union, May 23, 1848.

³Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Proceedings, Daily Union, May 25, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Daily Union, May 25, 1848.

⁶J. Bigelow, The Writings and Speeches of Samuel J. Tilden, I, 237.

⁷Ibid.; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

themselves before the beginning of the debate to support the ticket to be formed by the convention.¹ This pledge resolution caused a debate three hours in length and left no time for the adjustment of the case. Finally, the committee voted on the resolution. The vote stood even at fourteen. But Ross of Delaware returned to the committee room and cast his ballot for the resolution.² The Barnburners objected to the pledge. Cambreleng speaking for the Utica delegates presented the following protest:

The delegation of the Democracy of the State of New York to the Baltimore convention, respectfully protest against the decision of this committee, that before entering upon the examination of the evidence to their right to seats in the convention, and before they have become members of the body, they shall pledge themselves to the decision of the convention and support its nominees.-- They would feel themselves unworthy to represent the democracy of New York if they could submit to a decision which would impeach the integrity of the representative, and which would dishonor our state and subject its delegates to a condition which the convention expressly declined to impose upon the delegates of any other state in the Union prior to their admission. The delegates of the democracy of New York must be admitted to the Baltimore convention unconditional or not at all.³

Tremain representing the Hunkers read a report from his group stating that it had held a caucus and pledged itself to support the ticket prepared by the convention.⁴ Thus far the credentials of neither group had been presented. At this point Dickinson offered those of the Albany delegation. The committee did not consider them. It adjourned until 8:00 A.M.⁵ The committee met the following day at the time specified. Dickinson and Foster made speeches insisting upon the exclusion of the Utica delegation. They asserted that its members had declined to accept the pledge

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.; Albany Evening Atlas, May 25, 1848.

³Ibid.; Bigelow, op. cit., I. 240, 241; N.Y. Herald May 24, 1848.

⁴Albany Evening Atlas, May 25, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Bigelow, op. cit., I. 241.

to support the party ticket.¹ Replies in the form of speeches and the resolutions of the Utica convention were made by the Barnburners.² The Hunkers secured their claim to seats in the convention by a committee vote of 16 to 8; because they had expressed a willingness to support the nominations.³ Among those who voted for this decision and the imposition of the pledge resolution stood General Commander of South Carolina who later cast nine votes in the convention, Acklin of Alabama, Bayly of Virginia, and McAllister of Georgia.⁴ The Democracy of these three states had pledged themselves to decline to support any candidate who favored exclusion of slavery from the territories.⁵ Under these circumstances to require a pledge of the Barnburners seemed to them the highest form of injustice.

Returning to the convention the committee made its report.⁶ Cambreleng secured the floor and announced to the convention that the Utica delegation desired him to explain that its credentials had been withheld from the committee because the state convention had instructed it not to enter the Baltimore Convention, "on any other terms than those imposed upon the other delegations."⁷ Toucey of Connecticut considered the effort of the committee, "to commend a chalice to the lips of others, which they themselves would refuse with indignation"⁸ obviously unjust. He made a strong appeal for a new consideration of the question. In this

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.; Albany Evening Atlas, May 25, 1848; Niles' Register, 74: 76; Albany Argus, May 24, 1848.

⁴ Bigelow, op. cit., I, 238, 239.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Daily Union, May 25, 1848; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 76; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

⁷ Ibid.; Daily Union, May 25, 1848; Niles' Register, 74; 76; Proceedings.

⁸ Ibid.; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848; Daily Union, May 25, 1848.

appeal he referred to the sacrificial attitude assumed by the Democrats of New York in 1844. He declared, "that if when I presented myself at the door of this convention, a pledge of that kind had been demanded of me, I should have buttoned my coat, taken my hat and walked home."¹ At the close of his speech he presented a resolution stating, "That the report of the committee on credentials be re-committed to the same committee, with instructions to inquire into and report the facts."² A warm debate upon this resolution ensued in which Bayly defended the action of the committee, Yancey supported the resolution, and Bedinger opposed it.³ The convention placed the resolution and all its amendments upon the table and voted a new resolution which provided, "That the contesting delegations from the State of New York be heard before the convention through two speakers on each side--the speakers not to consume more than one hour each in addressing the convention."⁴

At the beginning of the third day's session Boggs of North Carolina presented a resolution requesting, "That both sets of delegates [of New York] be admitted to seats in this Convention, and both be entitled to vote on all questions, at the wish of the mover."⁵ But the convention rejected the resolution. The arguments, provided for on the preceding day, began with Dickinson's speech.⁶ He advocated strict party organization and insisted that the Albany delegates represented the Democracy of New York State;

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 24, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 25, 1848; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848.

³Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74:76; N.Y. Herald, May 25, 1848; Daily Union, May 25, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Proceedings; Public Ledger, May 25, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:77; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74:325; Daily Union, May 26, 1848.

⁶Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74:325; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848.

answered the charge of accepting a pledge to vote for party nominees before he had been admitted to the convention; gave an extended account of the party differences in New York; and supported the position adopted by the Syracuse Convention upon the Wilmot Proviso.¹ J. C. Smith made the first Barnburner reply. He placed the responsibility for the Democratic schism in New York upon the Hunker desire to secure all available patronage. The Utica delegation, he asserted, had not accepted and would not accept any pledge to support the ticket. A pledge of that type was as useless as it was insulting. The Utica Convention had not been an outgrowth of the Herkimer meeting: it was a compromise opportunity offered by the Democratic members of the New York Legislature to the two partisan elements. Smith spoke most highly of Wright, denied that the Barnburners belonged to the Abolitionist group, and asserted that, if rejected, the Utica delegates would go forth with their Democratic principles intact.² Foster closed the argument for the Hunkers.³ King, Doolittle, and Cambreleng together consumed the second hour for the Barnburners.⁴

At the end of the discussions Yancey secured the floor and presented a resolution providing for the acceptance of the Hunker delegation. He declared the Barnburners to be, "Whigs in disguise and abolitionists, who made the Wilmot Proviso the corner stone of their political edifice."⁵ The remainder of the third day of the convention was consumed by arguments concerning

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Daily Union, May 26, 1848; Niles' Register, 74: 325; Public Ledger, May 26, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 325; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848; Daily Union, May 26, 1848; Rochester Daily Advertiser, June 21, 1848.

³Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 325; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848; Public Ledger, May 26, 1848; Daily Union, May 26, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 325; Public Ledger, May 26, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848; Rochester Daily Advertiser, June 21, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 325; Public Ledger, May 26, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848; Daily Union, May 26, 1848.

the New York delegation. On the morning of the fourth day the convention voted,

That both sets of delegates now present and asking admission from the State of New York be, and they are hereby admitted to a full participation in all the privileges and proceedings of this Convention, and be authorized to cast seventy two votes for the State of New York, being the whole number of delegates claiming seats from that State, and that the vote and strength of every other state be relatively increased.¹

The convention adopted this resolution by a small majority. The Utica delegates asked for permission to hold a consultation.² They prepared a protest against the action of the convention, presented it, and withdrew because they did not wish to share their seats and influence with the Hunkers.³

The convention proceeded to nominate candidates for President and Vice-President.⁴ When Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey saw that the convention was ready to receive nominations he read a letter from Polk which forbade the use of his name as a candidate before the convention.⁵ This incident had little effect upon the Barnburners. On the fourth ballot the convention nominated Cass for the Presidency.⁶ Cass was little less objectionable to the Van Buren group than Polk.⁷ The Barnburners had two specific reasons for opposing him as the candidate for the Presidency. First, he had sought the party nomination in 1844 despite Van Buren's overwhelming popularity. Van Buren's close supporters believed that Cass had been an

¹Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 325; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848.

²Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 326; Daily Union, May 26, 1848.

³Bigelow, Op. cit., 242, 243, 244; Rochester Daily Advertiser, June 1, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74: 326, 327.

⁵Ibid.; Daily Union, May 26, 1848; N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848.

⁶Ibid.; Proceedings; Niles' Register, 74: 327; Public Ledger, May 26, 1848; Daily Union, May 26, 1848.

⁷H.B. Stanton, Random Recollections, 161; N.Y. Evening Post, May 26, 1848; Van Buren Papers, Jordan to J. Van Buren, June 13, 1848; Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc., LX, 118-120, Butler to Bancroft, June 10, 1848.

agent in the system of intrigue which caused his defeat at Baltimore in 1844. Second, Cass had indicated his dough-face inclination by supporting the annexation of Texas in 1844¹ and by writing his Nicholson letter in 1847.²

After having withdrawn from the Baltimore Convention, the Barnburners held a meeting for the purpose of preparing an address to their constituents. In this address they gave a full statement of the grievous treatment accorded them by the convention.³ In addition to an address they prepared a resolution which called a state convention to meet at Utica on June 22.⁴

Now that the Barnburners had in fact bolted, what would come next? The New York Herald thought, "They must either assume a bold front, adopt a new course, and hoist their standard anew, or be disgraced forever, as men of courage, capacity and independence";⁵ the Daily Union wished that, despite the call for the Utica Convention, the bolters would return and bolster the Democratic ticket;⁶ the Springfield Post hoped that they would go their way either to the Whig party or to a separate organization;⁷ and a correspondent of the New York Evening Post, following the policy of that paper, denied the validity of the Baltimore nomination and asserted that the Utica Convention must nominate a new ticket.⁸ However, some of the leading progressive Democrats both within and without the state of New York opposed separate nominations.⁹ Others considered the nomination of a new ticket not only

¹Niles' Register, 66: 197, Cass to Hannegan, May 10, 1848.

²Ibid., 73: 293, 294, Cass to Nicholson, Dec. 24, 1847.

³Albany Evening Atlas, May 30, June 2, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Van Buren Papers, Butler to Van Buren, May 29, 1848.

⁵N.Y. Herald, May 26, 1848.

⁶The Daily Union, June 10, 1848.

⁷Quoted in Albany Argus, May 31, 1848.

⁸Ibid., June 1, 1848.

⁹Van Buren Papers, Benton to Van Buren, May 29, 1848; Bryant Godwin Papers (Public Library of New York City), Dix to Bryant, June ___, 1848.

probable but very likely.¹ But John Van Buren even did not know who might be the candidate.² A separate nomination would lead to the formation of a new party or a merger with the Whigs. To Butler the former appeared the wiser course to pursue. Consequently, he began to make strokes in that direction³ by trying to prevent the General Committee of New York City from ratifying the nominations and calling a mass-meeting to respond to the Cass ticket.⁴ In these efforts he failed.⁵ But leaders who were not on the committee started a movement which led to another mass-meeting to protest against the action of the Baltimore Convention.⁶

At this meeting attended by several thousand enthusiastic persons,⁷ some of whom were evidently friendly to Cass,⁸ Mark Spencer presided.⁹ Cambreleng, who had served as leader of the Barnburners at Baltimore, made a short speech and then read the report of the Utica delegates to their constituents.¹⁰ The committee, appointed for that purpose, prepared an address and read it to the meeting.¹¹ A series of resolutions was adopted. These resolutions condemned the action of the Baltimore Convention; approved the withdrawal of the Utica delegates; declared the Baltimore nominations invalid; asserted the necessity for selecting new candidates; and opposed the extension of slavery into free terri-

¹Van Buren Papers, "Amicus" to Van Buren, May 27, 1848; Spofford to J. Van Buren, June 15, 1848; Chase Papers, J. Van Buren to Chase, June 8, 1848.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.; Butler to Van Buren, May 29, 30, 1848.

⁴Ibid.; Butler to Van Buren, May 31, 1848.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷N.Y. Herald, June 7, 1848; Albany Evening Atlas, June 8, 1848.

⁸N.Y. Herald, June 7, 1848.

⁹N.Y. Tribune, June 7, 1848.

¹⁰N.Y. Herald, June 7, 1848; Albany Evening Atlas, June 8, 1848.

¹¹Ibid.; N.Y. Tribune, June 7, 1848.

tories.¹ Butler, James Nye, and John Van Buren made speeches. In his speech John Van Buren disclaimed the existence of personal motives in either his father or himself.²

Little doubt of the selection of a new ticket existed after this mass-meeting in New York City. Finding a satisfactory leader appeared to be the largest problem. The development of anti-slavery groups in other states presented new possibilities. Blair, who had joined Benton and Dix in opposing separate action just after the close of the Baltimore Convention,³ now proposed a scheme for enlisting the interest of these states by encouraging the advancement of favorite sons.⁴ The list which he suggested contained the names of Pierce of New Hampshire, Dodge of Wisconsin, Wilmot of Pennsylvania, Brinkerhoff of Ohio, and Morton of Massachusetts.⁵ Scarcely need it be doubted, however, that first thought turned decisively toward Martin Van Buren.⁶ The delegates appointed by the several assembly districts of the county and city of New York, led by Samuel Waterbury, wrote to Van Buren asking him to state whether or not he would accept the nomination.⁷

To this letter Van Buren replied at length,⁸ not only commenting upon the use of his name by the Utica convention but making extended references to the issues of the day. Although he re-stated his desire to be left in private life, he acknowledged that there existed differences between this request and others

¹Ibid.; Albany Evening Atlas, June 8, 1848.

²Ibid.; New York Tribune, June 7, 1848.

³Van Buren Papers, Benton to Van Buren, May 29, 1848.

⁴Ibid., Blair to Van Buren, June 16, 1848.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., Morton to Flagg, June 17, 1848; Spofford to J. Van Buren, June 17, 1848; Waterbury and others to Van Buren, June 16, 1848; Jordan to J. Van Buren, June 13, 1848.

⁷Ibid., Waterbury and others to Van Buren, June 16, 1848.

⁸Ibid., Van Buren to Waterbury and others, June 20, 1848.

which he had received. "It is not in my nature," he wrote,

to decline a compliance with any request which such men [Radical Democrats of New York] are capable of making, except for reasons of the strongest character, which they themselves will on further consideration approve.¹

Van Buren declared this to be a distinct refusal.² But the refusal was not a distinct one and was disregarded by the Utica Convention.

Adverting to the Baltimore Convention his language became very clear and free of possible misinterpretation. Regarding the validity of the action of the Baltimore convention he wrote,

To give the doings of a Democratic National Convention a claim upon the support of the Democracy of any state, it is indispensably necessary that the Democracy of that state should be fairly represented in such convention, & allowed equal rights & privileges with their political brethren from other states in regulating its proceedings.³

Van Buren considered that the Utica delegation had pursued a commendable line of action. "But speaking for myself & for myself only," he said, "I do not hesitate to say that the representatives of the radical Democracy of this state were entirely right in their appreciation of the treatment they received & in the course they adopted."⁴ He was equally positive in stating that the decisions of the National Convention were neither binding upon the New York Democracy nor entitled to any more consideration than similar declarations made by political associates anywhere.⁵

Van Buren made three drafts of this letter. In the first and second he devoted a short paragraph to his attitude toward Cass. He described this position to be friendly despite obvious political differences. From the third draft all mention of the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., Van Buren to Dix, June 20, 1848.

³Ibid., Van Buren to Waterbury and others, June 20, 1848.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Democratic nominee was dropped.¹ After stating many arguments against the extension of slavery into the territories, most of which had already been asserted in, "The First Gun for Free Soil,"² he referred to Cass by saying, "I do therefore unhesitatingly approve the course you propose to pursue in withholding your votes from Governor Cass, and I shall do so myself."³

In accordance with the call issued by the Utica delegates made just after their withdrawal from Baltimore, the Barnburners met at Utica June 22, 1848.⁴ The convention organized by choosing Thomas Farington temporary chairman and Gilbert Dean and W. H. Shrogon secretaries. Delegates from Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Connecticut were admitted to the sessions of the convention.⁵ The chairman appointed committees on resolutions, address, and permanent organization.⁶ The committee on permanent organization reported the name of Samuel Young for chairman and eight other names for Vice-Presidents.⁷ S. B. Jewett made a request for the report of the Utica delegates to the Baltimore Convention.⁸ Making the first response to this request Preston King stated that the credentials had not been accepted by the Baltimore Convention and that the certificates would be returned to the Utica Convention by J. C. Smith.⁹ When the latter took the floor to return the credentials, he gave a brief statement of the content

¹Ibid., Compare 1st, 2nd, and 3rd drafts of Van Buren to Waterbury and others, June 20, 1848.

²Bigelow, op. cit., II, 537-574.

³Van Buren Papers, Van Buren to Waterbury and others, June 20, 1848.

⁴Niles' Register, 74:8; Proceedings of the Utica Convention for the Nomination of President and Vice President of the United States, held at Utica, N.Y., June 22, 1849.

⁵Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:8.

⁶Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁷Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:8.

⁸Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁹Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

of the report, which had already appeared in public prints.¹ Next the letter of the New York delegates to Van Buren and his reply were read amidst great applause.² Chairman Young read telegraphic communications from Chicago signed by the Mayor and a hundred others, from LaFayette, Indiana, and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.³ Each of these declared deep interest in the convention and expressed hearty sympathy with the principles promoted by the convention.⁴

Preston King proposed that the convention proceed to the nomination of candidates for President and Vice-President.⁵ Already the convention meeting in a caucus had cast a test ballot. The result was 69 votes for Van Buren and 25 for all other candidates. Now Jewett, "moved that Martin Van Buren be nominated by acclamation."⁶ The convention accepted the nomination giving it a unanimous vote.⁷ Dodge of Wisconsin was given the second place on the ticket.⁸ Several enthusiastic speeches were made. And Butler read the resolutions which his committee had prepared as the platform of the convention.⁹

The resolutions approved the course adopted by the Utica delegates at Baltimore. They denied any obligation of supporting the Cass ticket; expressed favor of making new nominations; and declared that the services of Martin Van Buren as the candidate to be so essential that his opposition to a nomination had been disregarded.¹⁰ In addition to these new resolutions, the old ones,

¹Ibid.; Proceedings.

²Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

³Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁴Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁶Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

⁷Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁸Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

⁹Ibid.; Proceedings.

¹⁰Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:377.

whose meaning had been expressed in those prepared at the Herkimer mass-meeting and the first Utica Convention, were added.¹ A future convention was anticipated by the following resolution:

That in case any convention of the free States, or any of them, shall be called for the purpose of collecting and concentrating the popular will in respect of the question of the Presidency, in which, in the judgment of the delegates appointed to represent the Democracy of New York in the Convention lately held at Baltimore, it shall be proper for them to take their seats, they, the same delegates, be, and are hereby requested--and so far as their Convention has power to do it, they are hereby authorized to attend and take part in such Convention.²

Finally, the platform urged the friends of the cause throughout the state to form, "Jeffersonian Leagues for free soil and free principles."³ Another principle was introduced by the resolutions. It provided for the passage of a Homestead law which would prevent the sale of large bodies of land to speculators and encourage citizens to purchase it by offering it at minimum costs.⁴

The convention accepted a very long and ably written address. This address placed full responsibility for the schism upon the Hunkers. The differences originated, the address stated, in 1837 as a consequence of the financial policy adopted by President Van Buren. Many Democratic leaders in the state had objected to this policy. The defeat of Van Buren for the Presidency in 1840 and for the party nomination in 1844, the loss of patronage in the state during the Polk administration, the defeat of Wright for the Governorship in 1846, the removal of Flagg from the services of the state in 1847, and the extraordinary changes in the party machinery of 1847 constituted the other causes for controversy.⁵ A discussion of the grievances of the Utica dele-

¹Ibid.; Proceedings.

²Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:387.

³Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁴Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:387.

⁵Proceedings.

gation at Baltimore included references to the unequal and dishonorable terms upon which they were allowed seats, the constant abuse and insults heaped upon them in the committee and in the convention, and the unique test required of them.¹ But the insults, humiliations, and injuries heaped upon the delegates, bad as they were, sank into, "comparative insignificance, when viewed in connection with the motive which led to their perpetuation."² The motive to be sure was the desire to enlarge the area of territory within which the system of slavery might grow. The Democrats of Alabama and other southern states had declared that they would not support any Wilmot Proviso ticket. Despite this clear and open avowal, the delegates from these states had been welcomed into the convention. No test was administered them; no pledge required. The Democratic ticket had been determined without consultation of the Democrats of New York. Because of this the Democracy of neither New York nor indeed those of states which had been represented at Baltimore were bound to accept and support the ticket. But not only was the nomination of Cass objectionable; that of Taylor was equally unsatisfactory. The Barnburners were not responsible for the introduction of the slavery issue into politics. But now with a discussion of it begun in the National Congress, no sense of expediency could prevent the assertion that the body possessed full authority to prohibit the introduction of the system into territories. From time to time in recent years the issue had been discussed by leaders but there had been a tendency to perceive its potential dangers as an issue and to avoid its agitation. Now it had come to be recognized as the outstanding political question. Being a matter of national significance,

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

it could no longer be disregarded or minimized. Free and slave labor could not co-exist. One or the other had to be discontinued. The mere thought of complete enslavement of labor could not be contemplated.¹

The convention adopted the letter of Jackson which he had written immediately after the nomination of Polk.² In this letter the General had expressed some satisfaction with the concession which had placed Polk in position to be elevated to the White House; but he also had stated that Van Buren would be recalled to power in 1848, "as the consummation of an act of justice due alike to him and to the honor and fame of the country."³

The reactions to the developments at Utica were varied in nature and interesting in character. Among those publications in New York which, though Democratic, opposed the Van Buren division of the party, the New York Herald considered that Van Buren would certainly be nominated and as certainly be forced to accept.⁴ After the Herald learned of Van Buren's nomination, it declared that his position contradicted his entire political life.⁵ A few days later it proclaimed him, "A cold-blooded, ambitious, revengeful and dishonest man."⁶ The Daily Union had no appreciation for the principles involved and could not understand the purpose of either Van Buren or his party. He could not, the Union thought, possibly be elected by the electoral college. The chance of his placing the election in the House of Representatives appeared infinitesimally small.⁷ Three days later Ritchie began his extensive

¹Ibid.

²Jackson Papers (L. of C.), Jackson to Butler, June 24, 1844.

³Ibid.

⁴N.Y. Herald, June 22, 1848.

⁵Ibid., June 25, 1848.

⁶Ibid., July 8, 1848.

⁷The Daily Union, June 25, 1848; Am. Hist. Ass'n., Report, 1929, Ellis to Calhoun, July 5, 1848; Prescott to Calhoun, July 5, 1848.

analysis of Van Buren's position. Attacking Van Buren, he said, was painful but evidently he liked pain. In the three subsequent issues he devoted eleven columns to that attack.¹ He believed that "Martin Van Buren, by throwing himself into this wild and fatal current, will sink to rise no more."² The Pennsylvanian plead with the Democrats of New York for unity with the conservative element of the party.³ The Albany Argus characterized the membership of the Utica Convention "a complete assortment of all classes of partisans--pharisaical democrats, abolitionists, and extreme politicians of all sorts--not excepting even flat-footed Whigs."⁴ The Cleveland Plain Dealer attributed Van Buren's action to,

ambition either for himself, his son, or his family name; evil counsels listened to in his retirement from this whispering gallery where envy holds her court; the poignancy that invariably results from political defeat; either one or all these causes tell the true interpretation of this estrangement.⁵

The Democratic Review asserted that "of all the public men who have risen to high honors, Mr. Van Buren has been indebted least to merit and most to party management."⁶ But that paper which analyzed the situation most accurately was the Charleston Mercury. "There is no mistaking the signs of the times," it stated, "and the period is rapidly approaching when all the party lines and distinctions will be broken up or merged in the political war cry adopted by these fanatics, The North Against the South."⁷ From the congress of the United States came the burning language of

¹The Daily Union, June 28, 29, 30, 1848.

²Ibid., June 25, 1848.

³The Pennsylvanian, June 24, 1848.

⁴Albany Argus, June 27, 1848.

⁵Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 28, 1848; For even stronger statement see, Boston Daily Times, June 27, 1848.

⁶Democratic Review, XXIII, 4.

⁷Charleston Mercury, June 26, 1848; Similar view in J. R. Giddings, Speeches in Congress, June 30, 1848.

representative Flournoy who exclaimed,

Unborn generations will hold up his name to the scorn and reproaches of ages yet to come. History will record him as one who for the gratification of his own selfish ambition, did not hesitate to sacrifice his own government, the freest and best on earth, under the influence of whose example the thrones of the old world were toppling to their fall, and the principles of republican liberty making progress to ultimate success. Sir, the treason of Arnold will be forgotten in view of the greater baseness and treachery of Martin Van Buren.¹

The supporters of Van Buren showed equal interest and zeal. One supporter exhorted him "with all the earnestness of a Methodist preacher," to accept the nomination not doubting that "you will be elected in spite of Cass, Taylor, slaveholders, and the devil."² John Van Buren wrote his father that he had never seen "anything in the constitution which enables you to forbid our voting for you."³ Blair thought "all seemed to recognize that the magicians hand was again weaving in the elements of the political world."⁴ Other letters rushed through the mails to Van Buren urging and encouraging him to accept the nomination.⁵

No formal notices of their nominations were sent to Van Buren and Dodge. The latter had recently gone to Washington as Senator. Here the Conservatives bedeviled him⁶ so much that he became nervous about the matter and published a card in the Daily Union. In this card he stated that he could not under the circumstances permit the use of his name.⁷ The declination arose, he said, neither from his opposition to Van Buren⁸ nor the movement

¹Appendix to Cong. Globe, 1st Sess. 30th Cong., XIX, 847.

²Van Buren Papers, Parker to Van Buren, Jan. 24, 1848.

³Ibid., J. Van Buren to Van Buren, June 26, 1848.

⁴Ibid., Blair to Van Buren, June 26, 1848.

⁵Ibid., Martin to Van Buren, June 27, 1848; Shekell to Van Buren, June 27, 1848; Welles to Van Buren, July 3, 1848.

⁶Ibid., Welles to Van Buren, July 3, 1848.

⁷Daily Union, June 30, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:19; N.Y. Tribune, July 1, 1848.

⁸Ibid.; Daily Union, June 30, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:19.

which he led; but because his state had participated in the Baltimore Convention and had accepted the Democratic ticket.¹ In making this statement he was doubtless sincere. Prior to his choice as Senator a group of the members of the State Legislature requested his views upon slavery extension. In reply he wrote,

I am opposed to the extension of slavery, either into territory now owned, or hereafter to be acquired by the United States, and that I shall, if elected to the senate, vote against any proposition for its further extension, and for every reasonable and just one by which the area of freedom may be extended.²

Although Van Buren did not receive official notification of his nomination by the Utica Convention, he gave public notice of his acceptance in a letter to the Chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Industrial Congress.³ This letter stated that,

The Utica Convention composed chiefly of men & the descendants of men who have been my political associates & fast friends from the commencement to the termination of my political career believing that the use of my name as a candidate for the Presidency was necessary to the proper support of their principles and the maintenance of that independent position which they had been driven by the injustice of others to assume, asserted & exercised the right of so employing it Placed as their fellow citizen in the same situation & bound to them by the strongest gratitude & respect, & holding the same opinions for entertaining which they had been virtually expelled from all communion with their old associates in the political field I could not hesitate in authorizing the declaration that I should not feel myself at liberty to interpose any farther obstacle to their proceedings.⁴

The withdrawal of the Barnburners from the Baltimore Convention and the nominations made by the Utica Convention served to stimulate active opposition to the candidates of both the old parties. Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, who opposed the selection

¹Ibid.; N.Y. Tribune, July 1, 1848; Daily Union, June 30, 1848.

²Public Ledger, June 30, 1848.

³Van Buren Papers, Van Buren to Chairman of Industrial Congress. July ___, 1848.

⁴Ibid.

of Taylor by the Whigs,¹ now returned to the eighth congressional district and made a speech in which he declared that he had informed the Whig Convention that he would not support the ticket. The six thousand Whigs who had supported John Quincy Adams, "would spurn, with scorn and contempt, a nomination forced upon them by the arrogance of the south, aided by the severity of the north."² Willis Hall wrote Clay, who also was not well pleased with preceding developments, that "The Whigs in this quarter everywhere are joining the Barnburners, ready to make the slave question the great issue in the future."³ The Barnburner movement had spread beyond the limits of New York State. Opposition to slavery and its extension served as a magnet which drew together those who opposed Taylor and those who denounced Cass.

In Massachusetts a circular calling for a convention of those opposed to the nominations made by the old parties was signed by many able men of both parties.⁴ The convention met at Worcester, June 28, 1848.⁵ Many of the strongest men in the state and some very distinguished ones from other states attended.⁶ Speeches were made by Wilson and Allen of Massachusetts, Paine and Hart of Rhode Island, Woodman of Maine, and Giddings of Ohio.⁷ The convention chose delegates for the convention to be held at Buffalo, which had been called by the joint meeting held at Columbus, Ohio, on June 22; and voted a series of resolutions. Among the latter was one declaring, "That we, the people of Massa-

¹The Papers of William Schouler (Lib. of the Mass. Hist. Society, Boston), Brewer to Schouler, May __, 1848.

²Boston Atlas, June 22, 1848.

³C. Colton, Works of Henry Clay Comprising his Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, IV, 564.

⁴N.Y. Tribune, June 30, 1848; Boston Daily Advertiser, June 29, 1848; Boston Daily Advertiser, June 28, 29, 1848.

⁵The Daily Morning Post, July 8, 1848.

⁶Niles' Register, 74:9; N.Y. Tribune, June 30, 1848; Massachusetts Spy, July 5, 1848.

⁷Daily Morning Post, July 8, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:9.

chusetts, will support no men as candidates for offices of President and Vice-President, but those who are known by their acts or declared opinions to be opposers to the extension of slavery."¹ Two days later Giddings spoke to another enthusiastic audience in Tremont Temple. Again he declared that he could not support Taylor and spoke in the highest terms of Van Buren.² Charles Sumner having attended the Worcester meeting considered that the movement had "been successful beyond my most sanguine expectations."³ Other meetings were held at Pittsburg;⁴ in New York City;⁵ Wyoming, New York;⁶ Clinton, New Jersey;⁷ Northville, Michigan;⁸ Indianapolis;⁹ Concord, Massachusetts;¹⁰ and Cincinnati, Ohio.¹¹ These meetings were generally of the mass type, some being very large ones.¹² The Free Soil State Convention at Indianapolis formed a state organization; approved the call for the Buffalo Convention; and selected delegates to attend its sessions.¹³ Of the smaller meetings the one held at Columbus, Ohio, June 22, 1848, must be considered of greatest significance. Whigs and Democrats composed this meeting. On the first day representatives of both parties held an executive session. A mass-meeting followed. In the mass-meeting there were four hundred delegates representing various portions of the state. Like many other meetings of this kind, it passed a series of resolutions. One of

¹Boston Daily Times, June 29, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:9.

²Boston Atlas, July 1, 1848.

³E. L. Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner, III, 168, Charles Sumner to George Sumner, July 4, 1848.

⁴N.Y. Tribune, July 11, 1848.

⁵Ibid., July 11, 1848.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., July 21, 1848.

⁹Indiana State Journal, July 29, 1848.

¹⁰Boston Daily Times, August 2, 1848.

¹¹Cincinnati Enquirer, July 4, 1848.

¹²N.Y. Herald, July 19, 1848; N.Y. Tribune, July 11, 1848.

¹³Indiana State Sentinel, July 29, 1848.

these called for a national convention to meet at Buffalo, New York, on August 9, 1848, for the purpose of nominating candidates for President and Vice-President.¹ After this decisive step had been taken at Columbus and a similar one by the Utica Convention,² corresponding ones were taken by other meetings of protest. These meetings generally approved the Buffalo Convention and selected delegates to attend it.³ The dream of a National Convention, composed of all groups opposed to slavery, held by the enemies of the peculiar institution had become a reality.⁴

In the meantime leaders gave attention to finding the most satisfactory candidate for the Free Soil Party. The extension of the movement beyond the boundaries of New York State rendered the acceptance of Van Buren less likely. He might be strong enough enemy of slavery extension to satisfy the Barnburners of New York without pleasing the Abolitionist elements in other states.⁵ Again the two wings of the Democratic party in New York had to present their claims to public confidence before the voters of the state. The Free Soilers tried to explain Van Buren's pro-slavery record before 1844.⁶ The conservatives sought to make his sudden conversion to Free Soil appear in as bad light as possible.⁷

But the short cut of Van Buren's anti-slavery coat was not the only embarrassing feature. A beginning had been made toward

¹National Era, July 6, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:8,9; H. Wilson, Rise and Fall of Slave Power in America, II, 144.

²Rochester Daily Advertiser, July 19, 1848.

³Boston Daily Advertiser, Aug. 2, 1848; Indiana State Sentinel, July 29, 1848; N.Y. Tribune, July 19, 21, 1848; Daily Morning Post, July 8, 1848; Van Buren Papers, Finley to Wadsworth, July 9, 1848; Ruggles to Van Buren, July 22, 1848.

⁴Sumner Papers (Harvard University Lib.), Jamlin to Sumner, Feb. 28, 1848; Bailey to Sumner, May 31, 1848.

⁵Ibid.; King to Van Buren, July 12, 1848; Van Dyck to Van Buren, July 17, 1848; Adams to Van Buren, July 16, 1848; Van Buren to Adams, July 24, 1848; N.Y. Herald, July 6, 1848.

⁶National Era, July 13, 1848.

⁷Van Buren Papers, Howard to Van Buren, July 12, 1848; Daily Union, June 16, 1848; Appendix to Cong. Globe, XIX, 797, 798, 964.

organizing a third party in Ohio in 1847. Upon this effort Salmon P. Chase looked suspiciously. He said that organizing a third party had proved to be a difficult task. To him it appeared best to form an Anti-slavery League, to operate with both old parties for a time, and finally to join with the Democrats in the nomination of Silas Wright for the Presidency on an Anti-slavery platform that returned to the principle of the Ordinance of 1787.¹ Personally Chase inclined toward the Democratic party because he believed this party followed its principles more closely.² To facilitate the development of this program he insisted that the Liberty party defer making its nominations for President and Vice-President until May or June, 1848.³ Despite this opposition of Chase and others,⁴ the Liberty party held its National Convention at Buffalo early in November, 1847, and nominated John P. Hale of New Hampshire for President.⁵ After the nomination of Van Buren the advantage of a fusion of Liberty men and Barnburners came to be appreciated. But the Liberty party had already nominated Hale. Any effort which might be made to get him to withdraw threatened loss of strength. In order to reduce the evil effect of this situation to the smallest degree possible Hale, influenced by an able letter from Chase⁶ and long conferences with other close friends,⁷ explained to his supporters his complete willingness to withdraw.⁸ Even then many leading Liberty

¹R.B.Warden, An Account of the Private Life and Public Services of Salmon P. Chase, 314; Chase to Hale, May 12, 1847; Am. Hist. Ass'n., Report, 1902, II, 120, 121, Chase to King, July 15, 1847.

²Ibid.; Warden, op. cit., 314, Chase to Hale, May 12, 1847.

³Am. Hist. Ass'n., Report, 1902, II, Chase to Leavitt, June 16, 1847; Op. cit., 123. Chase to Sumner, Sept. 22, 1847; Papers of John P. Hale (Lib. of New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N. H.), Chase to Hale, Sept. 23, 1847.

⁴Ibid., Tuck to Hale, Aug. 2, 1847.

⁵Miles' Register, 173:173; Hale Papers, Leavitt to Hale Nov. 9, 1847.

⁶Chase Papers (L. of C.), Chase to Hale, June 16, 1848.

⁷Ibid., Stanton to Chase, Aug. 6, 1848.

⁸Ibid.; National Era, July 13, 1848.

men declared they could not support Van Buren.¹

The Free Soil Movement contained disgruntled Whigs as well as dissatisfied Democrats. The long period in which these two groups had been political enemies and the longer one in which Van Buren had been associated with the latter party made his nomination one of questionable expediency.² Whigs and Democrats respectively sought to carry into the new movement as much of the nature and as many of the personalities of their original party as possible.³ The undoubted preference for Van Buren held by the Democrats was offset by a similar one for Judge John McLean of Ohio by the Whigs.⁴

Judge McLean had been a probable Whig nominee in 1840 and 1844. By 1846 his friends were again considering the possibility of his securing the nomination.⁵ Early in 1847 he definitely announced his candidacy for the Presidency.⁶ By the beginning of 1848 those Whigs most opposed to slavery considered his nomination quite likely.⁷ When the "conscience" Whigs found that their National Convention had entrusted the party standard to Taylor, they turned to McLean as the best Free Soil candidate. Already he had given satisfactory expressions upon the "Wilmot Proviso."⁸ A committee of citizens of Cleveland, Ohio,⁹ the central committee

¹Chase Papers (Lib. of Pa. Hist. Soc., Phila.), Leavitt to Chase, July 7, 1848; Chase Papers (L. of C.), Stanton to Chase, July 3, 1848; Willig to Chase, July 10, 1848; Sumner to Chase, July 7, 1848; Hale Papers, Tappan to Hale, July 8, 1848.

²Am. Hist. Ass'n., Report, 1902, II, 136, Chase to Hale, June 16, 1848.

³C.F. Adams, R.H. Dana, I, 135, Dana to wife, July 21, 1848; Chase Papers, (L. of C.) Sumner to Chase, Feb. 11, 1848; Indiana State Sentinel, July 12, 1848.

⁴Adams, op. cit., I, 135; Dana to wife, July 21, 1848; Chase Papers, (L. of C.), Sumner to Chase, July 7, 1848.

⁵John McLean, Letters to John Tuesdale, McLean to Tuesdale, March 27, July 9, September 26, December 17, 1846.

⁶McLean, op. cit., McLean to Tuesdale, Feb. 6, 1847.

⁷Chase Papers, (L. of C.) Ellis to Chase, April 8, 1848; Sumner to Chase, Feb. 7, 1848.

⁸The Papers of Justice John McLean (Library of Congress) Chase to McLean, Feb. 12, 1848; National Era, July 6, 1848.

⁹Ibid., Committee of Citizens to McLean, July 11, 1848.

of Ohio for the Peoples' Convention,¹ and individual citizens² urged him to permit the use of his name at Buffalo. McLean made a reply to the Committee of Citizens of Cleveland declining to allow the presentation of his name at Buffalo.³ The use of his name in the canvass for the Whig nomination, the failure of the Ohio delegates to support him at the Whig National Convention, and the promise of success of Van Buren's candidacy rendered acceptance of the nomination by him impossible.⁴ After seeing Van Buren's letter to the Industrial Congress, McLean re-stated his objection to the presentation of his name at Buffalo.⁵ Chase heard of his first declination.⁶ Having received the second unfavorable expression he wrote an urgent letter asking McLean to permit his friends to press his candidacy for either President or Vice-President.⁷ Chase argued that the ticket would be a strong one; might even be strong enough to win the election of 1848; and that it would be certain to do so in 1852.⁸ Regardless of which position McLean might accept in 1848, Chase, agreeing with Giddings,⁹ considered that he would certainly obtain the first place in 1852.¹⁰ Other requests were made¹¹ but to no effect. McLean denied the use of his name by the convention.¹²

The refusal of McLean to become a candidate before the

¹Ibid., Central Committee to McLean, July 12, 1848.

²Ibid., Giddings to McLean, July 13, 1848; Jones to McLean, July 17, 1848; Phillips to McLean, July 17, 1848; White to McLean, July 17, 1848; Sumner to McLean, July 31, 1848.

³Ibid., McLean to Committee of Citizens, July 31, 1848.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Chase Papers, (P.H.S.) McLean to Chase, Aug. 2, 1848.

⁶Ibid., Hamlin to Chase, Aug. 1, 1848.

⁷Indiana State Sentinel, July 12, 1848; Chase Papers, (L. of C.) Fisher to Chase, July 17, 1848; Nichols to Chase, July 21, 1848; Stewart to Chase, July 24, 1848.

⁸McLean Papers, Chase to McLean, Aug. 2, 1848.

⁹McLean Papers, Giddings to McLean, July 13, 1848.

¹⁰Ibid., Chase to McLean, Aug. 2, 1848.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., Chase to McLean, Aug. 3, 4, 1848.

¹³Adams, op. cit., I, 139, Quotation from Dana, Diary, Aug. 9, 1848.

Buffalo convention removed the strongest of the Whig possibilities. It left Van Buren in such a position as to render his nomination by that convention inevitable.

With these conditions prevailing men numbered by thousands pushed on to Buffalo.¹

All day and all night the steam engines toiled along the iron tracks, and the steamboats ploughed the waters of those Mediterranean seas, with their pillars of cloud by day and fire by night, bringing up the faithful Israel to this great solemnity.²

Reduced rates by the railroads³ and the conversion of canal and lakeboats into lodging houses⁴ served to enlarge the diversified group. Eighteen states had sent a total of four hundred and sixty-five delegates.⁵

Having reached Buffalo the representatives of New York and Ohio met in separate rooms for consultation.⁶ Those from New England had assembled in the cabin of the "Henry Hudson" on their way up the river from New York City.⁷ At this conference they decided upon a plan of organization for the convention.⁸ For temporary chairman the convention chose Nathaniel Sawyer of Ohio.⁹ At an informal meeting of the delegates evidence of differences between the Barnburners and their more Abolitionist brethren from Ohio concerning the content of the platform manifested themselves.¹⁰

¹National Era, Aug. 24, 1848.

²R. H. Dana, Speeches in Stirring Times, 149, 150.

³Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; National Era, Aug. 3, 1848; Rochester Daily Advertiser, July 31, 1848.

⁴Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848.

⁵Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____; National Era, Aug. 24, 1848; N.Y. Tribune, Aug. 17, 1848.

⁶N.Y. Tribune, Aug. 9, 1848.

⁷Adams, op. cit., I, 137, quotation from Dana, Diary, Aug. 9, 1848.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____; Political Pamphlets, #9, "Oliver Dyers Phonographic Report of the Proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, New York, Aug. 9 & 10."

¹⁰Ibid.

Observing this beginning of what might prove to be dangerous dissension Chase called upon Preston King, probably the most radical of the Barnburners, for a speech.¹ In reply King made a distinctly Free Soil address.² At the conclusion the convention adopted the sentiments of King's speech in the form of resolutions. These resolutions served as the basis for the decisive actions of the convention.³ They stated that the Federal Government should, "abolish slavery wherever it has the constitutional power;" that the government bore no responsibility for the existence of slavery in the states; and that the exercise of congressional action promised the surest means of preventing the extension of slavery into the territories.⁴

Having found a platform upon which most of the delegates could act with reasonable harmony, the convention proceeded to complete its organization. The Temporary Chairman appointed a nominating committee which presented the name of Charles Francis Adams for permanent chairman.⁵ Each state delegation, except that of New York, selected a Vice-President.⁶ When Adams, wearing mourning for his father, was conducted to the chair, he was greeted with great applause which attested the enthusiasm of the new political group.⁷

At this point the convention divided into two groups. In the park the mass-meeting under the chairmanship of Adams met and listened to addresses made by able Free Soil speakers. This

¹Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____.

²Chase Papers, (P.H.S.) Chase to _____, Aug. 15, 1848; Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:109.

³Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____; Niles' Register, 74:109.

⁴Ibid.; Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____.

⁵Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; Niles' Register, 74:109.

⁶Ibid.; Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848.

⁷Adams, op. cit., 137, Quotation from Dana, Diary; Dana, op. cit., 152.

meeting remained in session to ratify the actions taken by the conferees.¹ Chase presided over the conferees, or official delegates.² They met in the Universalist Church.³ Each state had three delegates, one from each of the three parties for every representative which it had in Congress.⁴ The conferees worked in secret newspaper reporters not even being allowed admission.⁵ Butler served as chairman of the platform committee and reported the resolutions.⁶ The conferees adopted the platform first.⁷ Then the mass-meeting heard it read and adopted it with great enthusiasm.⁸

The platform stated that the convention had assumed its position to safeguard the rights of free labor against the aggression of slave power.⁹ It asserted that one of the old parties had denied admission to the regular Democracy of New York to its national convention,¹⁰ and that the other had abandoned its principles in behalf of availability.¹¹ In neither case had a satisfactory ticket been formed.¹² After these explanations of the causes for the action taken, came an imposing list of resolutions.

The convention took a firm position "upon the national platform of freedom, in opposition to the sectional platform of

¹Ibid.; Oliver Dyer, op. cit.

²Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, ____;
Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; N.Y. Herald, Aug. 10, 1848.

³Dana, op. cit., 152.

⁴Albany Atlas, Aug. 11, 1848; Warden, op. cit., Chase to
_____, March 21, ____; N.Y. Herald, Aug. 10, 1848.

⁵Proceedings.

⁶Ibid.; Albany Evening Atlas, Aug. 15, 1848.

⁷Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁸Ibid.; Albany Evening Atlas, Aug. 15, 1848.

⁹Niles' Register, 74:110; Albany Atlas, August 15, 1848;
Cooper and Fenton, American Politics, II, 30, 31; Proceedings.

¹⁰Niles' Register, 74:110; Proceedings.

¹¹Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:110.

¹²Ibid.; Proceedings; Cooper and Fenton, op. cit., II, 30.

slavery." Denying any intention of attempting to disturb the system of slavery in the states in which it then existed, the conferees firmly contended that the historic policy of the nation had not been "to extend, nationalize, or encourage, but to limit, localize, and discourage slavery." Congress had "no more power to institute or establish slavery than to institute or establish a monarchy." The Federal Government "should relieve itself from all responsibility for the existence or continuance of slavery" and "in the judgment of this convention, the only safe means of preventing the extension of slavery into territory now free, is to prohibit its existence in all such territories by an act of Congress."¹ In addition to this clear statement of the position held by the convention upon the question of slavery, the platform advocated economic administration of national affairs, internal improvements at national expense, free grants of land to actual settlers, and the payment of the national debt as soon as circumstances permitted.²

When the convention of the official delegates turned its attention to the consideration of candidates, it resorted to the good offices of an informal session.³ The first name to be called in this informal session was that of McLean. But Chase announced that McLean had declined positively to be a candidate before the convention.⁴ H. B. Stanton of New York then defined the position of Hale. The Liberty party had, Stanton asserted, nominated Hale during the previous year. Stanton said the Buffalo Platform

¹ Ibid.; Niles' Register, 74:110; Albany Evening Atlas, Aug. 15, 1848.

² Ibid.; Proceedings; Cooper and Fenton, op. cit., II, 31, 32. ³ Adams, op. cit., 139; Quotation from Dana, Diary; Warden, op. cit., 318, Chase to _____, March 21, _____.

⁴ Dana, op. cit., 154, 155; Adams, op. cit., quotation from Dana, Diary.

pleased the Liberty men greatly and that Hale desired that his candidacy be abandoned so that he might go before the convention upon terms equal to those of others.¹ Next the convention asked Butler to explain Van Buren's attitude.² After showing modest hesitancy he complied by making a speech. In his speech he went over the history of the Barnburner movement. At the end of his discourse he read a letter which Van Buren had placed in his hand.³ In this letter the Ex-President said,

It may happen in the course of the deliberations of the convention that you become satisfied that the great [sic] of your proceedings can in your opinion be best promoted by an abandonment of the Utica nomination. You will not in that event want assurances of my uniform desire never again to be a candidate for the Presidency or for any other public office but may apprehend that it might not be agreeable to me to be superceded in the nomination after what has taken [sic] in regard to it. It is upon this point that I desire to protect you agt the slightest embarrassment by assuring you as I very sincerely & very cheerfully do that so far from experiencing any mortification from such a result it would be one most satisfactory to my feelings and true interests, wishes.⁴

The conferees next proceeded to cast an informal ballot for President. In this ballot all the Democrats cast their votes for Van Buren.⁵ Most of the Liberty men gave their support to Hale.⁶ But Chase of Ohio, Stanton of New York, and a few others of this party voted for Van Buren.⁷ This division naturally left the balance of power in the hands of the Whigs.⁸ The critical moment of the convention came when Massachusetts was called.⁹ Stephen C. Phillips, a Vice-President of the convention, voted

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.; Dana, op. cit., 154, 155.

³Ibid.; Proceedings, Adams, op. cit., quotation from Dana, Diary; Miles' Register, 74:109.

⁴Van Buren Papers, Van Buren to Buffalo Convention, Aug. 2, 1848.

⁵Adams, op. cit., quotation from Dana, Diary.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

first casting his ballot for Van Buren.¹ Others followed his lead.² The final vote gave Van Buren 244,³ Hale 181,⁴ and Scattering 41.⁵ Van Buren being the apparent choice of a considerable majority, Joshua Leavitt, a Liberty party leader of Massachusetts who had declared that the members of the Liberty party would not support him,⁶ made the most remarkable and effective speech of the convention in which he moved that the nomination be made unanimous.⁷ Immediately Van Buren was nominated by acclamation.⁸

The Liberty men who had inclined far toward Abolitionism had adopted their platform; the Democrats had nominated their candidate for the Presidency; now the Whigs had their opportunity to secure the Vice-Presidency.⁹ It was generally accepted that the Vice-Presidential candidate should not only be a Whig but a western man as well,¹⁰ even though Edward Everett said that he had been offered the second place on the ticket.¹¹ But when the delegates of Ohio had consulted with those of other western states, they named Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts.¹² The convention unanimously accepted this nomination also.¹³

While the mass-meeting waited for official action by the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁴Ibid.; Adams, op. cit., quotation from Dana, Diary.

⁵Ibid.; Proceedings.

⁶Chase Papers, (P.H.S.) Leavitt to Chase, July 7, 1848.

⁷Adams, op. cit., 141, quotation from Dana, Diary; Proceedings; Chase Papers, (P.H.S.), Chase to _____, Aug. 15, 1848; George W. Julian, Political Recollections, 60, 61.

⁸Adams, op. cit., 141; Quotation from Dana, Diary; Proceedings; N.Y. Herald, Aug. 12, 1848.

⁹Adams, op. cit., 141, Quotation from Dana, Diary; C.F. Adams, C.F. Adams, 91.

¹⁰Proceedings; Everett Papers, Everett to Fillmore, March 7, 1849.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Proceedings; Adams, op. cit., 141, Quotation from Dana, Diary.

¹³Ibid.; Proceedings; Chase Papers, (P.H.S.) Chase to _____, Aug. 15, 1848.

conferrees in the church, it listened to speeches made by able orators.¹ Many of these speeches were of the ultra-sensational type. Judge James Nye of New York in a short speech on the first day of the convention acclaimed Wilmot a second David, who "with the sling of freedom and the smooth stone of truth struck the giant slavery between the eyes."² On the second day he made another denying all responsibility for promoting the creation of a sectional party.³ He placed all responsibility upon the instructions furnished by southern states to their delegations to the Democratic National Convention.⁴ Giddings declared that he would not wait for enemies to make war upon him but that he would commence it against them and carry it to Africa, if necessary.⁵ To make this part of the program complete an ex-slave, who had escaped bondage among the Cherokee Indians, spoke to the convention. He had lived in Kentucky and Alabama. Michigan had denied him the privilege of voting because of his color. Cass had told him that he "was not at liberty to make any political declarations."⁶ The colored member hoped that the election "would emancipate General Cass, and give him the liberty to act, if he so chooses, in favor of freedom."⁷

The convention, including many political affiliations, holding a variety of views, harmonizing on only the one question of opposition to slavery closed its sessions in full accord.⁸

¹N.Y. Herald, Aug. 13, 1848; Proceedings; Adams, op. cit., 140, Quotation from Dana, Diary.

²Proceedings.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸National Era, Aug. 24, 1848; N.Y. Herald, Aug. 12, 1848; Van Buren Papers, Chase to Van Buren, Aug. 16, 1848; Hubbell, op. cit., IV, 155; W.F. Johnston, History of New York State, Political and Governmental, II, 363.

Prior to this time friends of Taylor had showed a willingness to accept the situation with satisfaction.¹ But seeing the defection of large groups of their party, they began to look upon the movement with growing uneasiness. They sought to hold their fellow-Whigs in the ranks by threats,² stating that a Whig vote for Van Buren amounted to a half vote for Cass.³ They designated the Buffalo platform "A Van Buren turn-table."⁴ The Massachusetts Spy characterized Adams as the "weakest renegade among them" and accused him of allowing the "town of Quincy an opportunity to repudiate the funeral expenses of his father."⁵

On the other hand the conservative and pro-slavery Democratic organs sought satisfaction by increasing the volume of abuse which they had been pouring upon Van Buren.⁶ The Daily Union accused him of being "Hurried on by disappointed ambition and by rankling revenge because he could not be made a second time the President of the United States."⁷ This paper derived pleasure in quoting from the Coos Democrat an article which argued that, "He is the only one [President] who has become popular with the bitter enemies of his own administration, and has given to those who supported him good reason to regret that support."⁸ The Albany Argus called the Buffalo ticket the "cabbage and codfish ticket."⁹ This epithet stimulated the Albany Evening

¹Boston Atlas, July 14, 1848; Boston Daily Advertiser, June 27, 1848; Schouler Papers, Brewer to Schouler, May __, 1848; T.C.Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties, 149.

²National Intelligencer, Aug. 22, 1848.

³Boston Daily Advertiser, Aug. 19, 1848.

⁴Boston Atlas, Aug. 26, 1848.

⁵Massachusetts Spy, Aug. 30, 1848, Quoted from True Whigs.

⁶For similar view see H.D.A. Donovan, The Barnburners, 105; Beardsley, Reminiscences, 536.

⁷Daily Union, Aug. 24, 1848.

⁸Ibid., Aug. 31, 1848.

⁹Albany Argus, Sept. 8, 1848.

Journal to designate it the "Siamese Twin ticket."¹ Enemies searched out and published a musty pamphlet, written by C. F. Adams subsequent to the publication of Van Buren's Texas letter in 1844, in which the author charged Van Buren with not being "fixed to anything But His Own Interest."² The Charleston Mercury, which had so soundly berated Commander for casting the nine votes of South Carolina for Cass without authority to do so and had thus far hesitated to declare its position, stated definitely its intention to support the Democratic ticket.³ Despite long association with Van Buren and firm friendship for him, Bancroft asserted that he could not support him.⁴ Concerning the latter's coalition with Adams, Bancroft forbade "the banns."⁵

Friends of the Free Soil Movement inaugurated an active campaign. The Pennsylvania delegates at Buffalo met on the second day of the convention and called a state convention to meet at Reading;⁶ in Indiana the Free Soil Sentinel, the Free Soil Banner, and other Free Soil papers were established;⁷ the New York Evening Post published anew the instructions to the delegates to the National Convention of 1844;⁸ many mass-meetings assembled in various portions of the free states;⁹ and state Free Soil Conventions met to give the appearance of stability and regularity to the movement.¹⁰ Joshua Leavitt worked his "steam up to

¹Albany Evening Journal

²Pittsburg Morning News, Sept. 11, 1848; Albany Argus, Aug. 8, 1848.

³Charleston Mercury, Aug. 31, 1848.

⁴M.A.D.Howe, Life and Letters of George Bancroft, II, 36, 37.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The Pennsylvanian, Aug. 18, 1848.

⁷Indiana State Sentinel, Aug. 26, 30, 1848.

⁸N.Y. Evening Post, Aug. 22, 1848.

⁹Public Ledger, Aug. 28, 1848; Indiana State Sentinel, Sept. 2, 1848; C. Sumner, His Complete Works, II, 291, 292.

¹⁰Rochester Daily Advertiser, Sept. 15, 1848; The Pennsylvanian, Sept. 16, 1848; Public Ledger, Sept. 14, 1848; Pierce, op. cit., III, 171.

the highest pitch in favor of Van Buren & Adams."¹

And Charles Sumner² and the National Era³ contended that they supported the Van Buren of 1848; not him of 1838.

The committee gave Van Buren official notice of the action of the convention. The letter referred to the size of the mass-meeting, to the various party groups in attendance there, to the diversified contents of the platform, and to the high degree of enthusiasm and harmony which prevailed in the sessions.⁴ The committee ascribed this harmony to the common opposition to the extension of slavery.⁵

In reply Van Buren characterized his position a peculiar one; one which required considerable explanation. He attempted to make clear again that he had been sincere in his withdrawal from public life in 1844. All efforts by political associates to secure his consent to the presentation of his name at Baltimore in 1848 had met his pronounced opposition, he said. The fact that the Utica Convention believed the use of his name necessary for the promotion of the great principle to which that convention subscribed persuaded him to place no further obstacle in the way of its leaders. Under the circumstances he felt honored to receive the approval of so enlightened and patriotic a following.⁶

Having accepted the nomination he gave attention to the platform. With some interpretations he thought it appeared quite acceptable. The major portion of the resolutions referred to the extension of slavery. His position, he declared, was that established by the founders of the Republic. It contained three prin-

¹Chase Papers, (P.H.S.) Leavitt to Chase, Aug. 21, 1848

²Sumner, op. cit., III, 296.

³National Era, Aug. 24, 1848.

⁴Van Buren Papers, Chase and others to Van Buren, Aug. 16, 1848.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Van Buren Papers, Van Buren to Butler and others, Aug. 22, 1848.

cial features: security against extension of slavery into free territories; non-interference with the system of the states in which it then existed; and a spirit of forbearance toward the institutions in localities under the control of Congress.¹ This position had been the historic one of the nation. But recently the slave-holding states had adopted an aggressive attitude. At the time of the adoption of the constitution seven of the thirteen states had either abolished slavery or expected to abolish it soon. The Ordinance of 1787 provided for six free states. Five had been created in that territory. Consequently, Van Buren contended that of the first eighteen states, provided for by the National government, twelve were free and six slave. Since that beginning nine slave states and only three free ones had been added to the Union. The partisans of the peculiar institution asserted their right to carry slaves not only into territory freed by congressional enactment but into areas acquired from Mexico by conquest. No explanation of these pro-slavery extensions needed to be looked for beyond the change of southern leaders upon the slavery question. During the Missouri controversy President Monroe and his cabinet, which contained Calhoun, William H. Crawford, and William Wirt discussed the authority of Congress to govern the territories and decided unanimously in favor of the exercise of that power. He asserted that the position held by southern leaders in 1848 was a departure from the time-fixed practices of the government. Their position, he believed, depended upon the untenable assertion that the people of the southern states, by acquiescing in a policy of restriction, would accept a status of subordination and degradation.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

In the case of the elimination of slavery from the District of Columbia, Van Buren held the position which he had already explained. Many causes which led to his opinion of 1837, he declared, no longer existed. But he occupied in general the attitude which he defined at that time. Unless agitation of the question continued, slavery in the District of Columbia would eventually fail, he thought. However, he refused to give assurance that he would withhold his approval, if both houses of Congress passed an act discontinuing slavery there.¹

Van Buren saw no reason for changing the policy observed by President Jackson and himself regarding national appropriations for local improvements. Occasions might arise which would justify such appropriations. But extreme care must be observed to prevent the development of abuses in connection with the exercise of that function. The land policy ought to be one which inclined toward the development of the land resources of the country with preference given to those people seeking homes. In order that the government might secure adequate revenue he favored a system of direct taxation; but, recognizing the necessity of depending upon import duties for years to come, he yielded to the imposition of tariff duties bearing revenue rather than protective rates.²

Van Buren must have known that the positions taken in this letter of acceptance differed from those which he had held while a member of the Democratic party. Whether these changes had been made as a consequence of conviction or of some other motive cannot be determined. The estimates of a man's motives, made by either friends or enemies, cannot be accepted as valid.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

Even less can the explanations made by the man himself in the heat of a political campaign to justify a new position be credited as the unvarnished truth. In this instance former friends, then enemies, charged him with a desertion which emanated from either ambition or a desire for revenge; former enemies, then friends, approved his position and attributed all changes to upright conviction; and he, clinging to as much of the letter of the old attitude as could be harmonized with the spirit of the new one, insisted upon his sincerity. Southerners and pro-slavery men everywhere might brand him an apostate; northern Whigs might still consider him a common foe; and the abolitionists might slightly distrust the former northern man with southern principles. But on one question none could argue: Martin Van Buren was the bearer of a new standard.

